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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 4 July 2003, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. KUSSEIN (Ethiopia)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL **DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION** (continued)

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In the absence of Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala), Mr. Hussein (Ethiopia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (agenda item 3) (continued)

Dialogue with the country team of Senegal

Mr. RHAZAOUI (Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that he was speaking on behalf of the entire country team, which comprised 22 funds and programmes in Senegal. He gave a general overview of the United Nations system's contribution towards combating poverty in Senegal. Although aid for development had decreased until the year 2000, an increase was anticipated, owing to the expected impact of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative and the outcome of the recent meeting in Paris of the consultative group on Senegal. The United Nations system, including the World Bank, provided approximately 32 per cent of public aid for development. General coordination between the various partners was carried out under the joint aegis of the World Bank and UNDP during six-monthly meetings and, more particularly, within the framework of 11 sector-based thematic groups.

The United Nations had encouraged the Senegalese Government to emphasize rural development and had actively participated in the drafting of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which had been adopted in 2002. The document was based on the main Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) defined three areas of intervention: establishing a joint programme in the Tambacounda region, implementing a national plan of action for education for all, and relaunching development in Casamance once a peace treaty had been concluded.

Rural development represented the largest sector of public aid for development, with contributions of almost US$ 84 million per year. The United Nations had actively contributed to the elaboration of a strategic framework for the agricultural sector within the contact group consisting of UNDP, the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, bilateral partners and the European Union.

United Nations agencies (UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Food Programme (WFP), FAO, and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)) were working actively on the ground to support local initiatives and decentralization, particularly by strengthening the capacity of local communities. They were also contributing to projects that had an immediate impact on the lives of the people, such as the installation of multifunctional platforms as a source of energy for remote villages. Besides conserving the environment and combating desertification, other areas of action included humanitarian aid in Casamance and the creation of a national monitoring body to oversee the implementation of the PRSP.

Mr. NIANE (Coordinator, Unit on Follow-up to the Programme to Fight Poverty, Ministry of Economics and Finance of Senegal) presented the PRSP for Senegal. Senegal had been eligible to benefit from the HIPC Initiative since 2000, and it was in that context that the document had been drafted, on the basis of a participatory process and in close collaboration with the United Nations system. According to research carried out in 2000, poverty affected 53.9 per cent of the population, and more than 60 per cent of households considered themselves poor. Despite fairly sustained growth, which was currently at approximately 5 per cent, poverty had not decreased significantly since the devaluation in 1994. There were several factors behind the persistence of poverty: fragile growth, carried primarily by sectors that did not provide employment (tertiary sector and trade); highly inequitable distribution of income (60 per cent of the country's wealth was distributed among 20 per cent of the population); the burden of external debt; the decline of the primary sector, which had represented no more than 18.5 per cent of gross domestic product in 2000, in contrast to 35 per cent immediately after independence; insufficient agricultural production, which covered only 52 per cent of basic nutritional needs; environmental problems; and susceptibility to external violence. Poverty primarily affected rural areas: four out of five poor households were located in the countryside, the poorest areas being those where agriculture was less diversified and irrigation rarely used.

Based on those factors, the PRSP defined three main objectives: to double per capita income by 2015 within the framework of strong and better distributed growth; to generalize access to essential social services by speeding up the development of basic infrastructure; to eliminate all forms of exclusion and institute sexual equality in primary and secondary

education. The intervention strategies were based on three principles: generating wealth in a stable macroeconomic framework; capacity-building and promoting basic social services; and improving living standards for vulnerable groups.

Generation of wealth depended particularly on increasing agricultural productivity, diversifying sources of income and exploiting fisheries. Regarding basic social services, it was planned to generalize elementary education, since the current school attendance rate was only 70 per cent, to improve health services and increase preventive activities, particularly in respect of HIV/AIDS, an area in which Senegal was a pioneer, and to increase access to drinking water with the aim of meeting the World Health Organization's standard of 38 litres per inhabitant per day, rather than the current 35 litres.

In order to increase good governance, new measures would be taken to promote greater transparency in business and public finance management, and to more effectively combat corruption. Regarding decentralization, the devolution of powers to the regions had not been accompanied by the transfer of the necessary resources. Adjustments must therefore be made to allow real decentralized management.

Action for vulnerable groups would be targeted at women and children, and another important aspect would be the development of a strategy for demarginalizing the disabled. Particular attention would be paid to those affected by the conflict in Casamance.

The implementation strategy was based on a participatory approach, decentralization of management and delegation of power to civil society. Monitoring would involve three instruments: working groups established to carry out central activities; focal points created within the relevant areas of management and technical services; and a monitoring unit run by civil society. Monitoring would be carried out annually on the basis of selected indicators, and procedures would be rectified as and when necessary in order to attain the objectives set for 2015. An information and communications system would also be established. Assessments would be carried out internally by the management bodies, and externally through public authorities or development partners. Such assessments would be based on the budgetary cycle, in order to facilitate any necessary changes in resource programming.

Mr. CISSOKO (National Council for Rural Cooperation (CNCR)) described the situation of the rural sector in Senegal and pointed out that since 1994, the Senegalese Government had decided to become more accessible to civil society organizations in general, and particularly to farmers' organizations, with which it had developed a genuine partnership.

From 1946 to 1980 agriculture had been the driving force behind development in Senegal, but the revenue it had generated had been used to build the new State and its infrastructure, and had principally benefited large urban centres, while rural areas had become poorer. As evidence of that, he said that in 1960, 95 per cent of rural households had been self-sufficient, whereas 80 per cent of people suffering from malnutrition at the present time lived in rural areas.

Political decisions had played a significant role in the increase of poverty among rural communities. The State had invested little in the development of food crops, giving precedence to cash crops for export, with the result that over half the food currently consumed by the Senegalese people was imported. That made them dependent both on food products coming from abroad and, for their income, on global markets beyond their control.

The pattern of access to social services also demonstrated the imbalance between rural and urban areas. When Senegal had gained independence in 1960, the Government had been primarily concerned with Dakar and other showcase towns, and it was only recently, with the development of the PRSP, that rural destitution had come into full view. It should also be noted that the structural adjustment policies imposed on the country by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had drastically reduced public spending, thus putting further strain on the already suffering rural sector, and that the United Nations system had not reacted to the threats to the dignity of farmers, who had been reduced to poverty by policies harmful to their interests.

The relationship between poverty and malnutrition was clear, and rural families were in an unenviable position. Even though the agriculture and forestry sector was undergoing difficulties, farmers were obliged to invest in order to produce, and were left with barely enough

income to feed themselves. Owing to changes in consumer trends, they no longer lived off their own produce and were obliged to purchase food. That had led to a problem of malnutrition, and even famine, despite the availability of food on the market.

It was not enough merely to diagnose poverty: it was also necessary to analyse its causes. Governments and their development partners must recognize their responsibilities and attack the underlying problems.

First and foremost, an end must be brought to the distortion of the market, which led to higher consumption of imported food products and to increasing difficulties in selling national produce abroad.

An end must also be brought to the situation in which only a minority had access to social security benefits and several other services, while the majority, on whom the country's wealth largely depended, were deprived of access because they had no status. Like many other African countries, Senegal had not signed ILO Convention No. 141 on rural workers' organizations, which granted worker status to farmers.

He called on the United Nations system to take action in support of farmers. Some United Nations agencies already provided much-needed assistance to farmers, by involving them in the elaboration of development programmes and providing funding for the implementation of such programmes, but further measures must be taken to protect farmers' interests, their dignity as workers, and their right to live off the fruits of their labours. He believed that the Economic and Social Council constituted a particularly appropriate forum in which to discuss such serious and fundamental issues.

Mr. RHAZAOUI (Resident Coordinator) stated that the United Nations agencies would like to be able to do more to assist Senegal, but had been prevented from doing so by limited resources and by certain constraints related to their mandate and to United Nations rules and procedures. However, a decision had been made to carry out an experimental joint programme in the Tambacounda region of Senegal without waiting to receive official directives on that new initiative.

Mr. NICKELS (Representative of UNIDO in Senegal) described the UNDAF initiative in Tambacounda (UNDAF-Tamba), which aimed to implement the PRSP and the Millennium Development Goals in Tambacounda, the poorest region of Senegal.

The initiative consisted of harmonizing and strengthening the activities of the United Nations system and other development partners in order to support the efforts made by the authorities and the population to promote the integrated development of the region. It was based on geographical concentration, in response to the declared aim of decentralizing the Senegalese State; a holistic approach, which integrated the social, economic and environmental aspects of development; a participative process; joint management by the regional authorities responsible for development and the United Nations system; and the search for partnerships with a view to mobilizing other resources. It must also be noted that the initiative offered prospects for long-term development and that the 22 United Nations funds and programmes located in Senegal were involved in its implementation.

Following an assessment of the existing situation, which had involved the compilation of an inventory of available statistics and indicators and of the projects and programmes being carried out in the region, those participating in the initiative had undertaken to harmonize their current activities and formulate new programmes.

Apart from the United Nations system, those involved in the project included a wide range of Senegalese State and regional bodies, a number of donors and development partners, civil society and the private sector.

The aim was to determine, through assessment and in the light of development goals established in different contexts (including the Millennium Development Goals, PRSP, the regional plan for integrated development and sectoral plans), where the deficiencies lay and how to remedy them. Possible actions included the identification and dissemination of best practices and conclusions drawn from experience, the mobilization of new partners, the creation of operational synergies between the projects under way, and the development of new programmes that responded to priority needs and put the comparative advantages of the United Nations system to best use.

"Clusters" were an interesting concept, which consisted of grouping several projects around one central project, or a common outcome or target, in order to have a more powerful impact. For example, other projects were connected to the joint UNDP/UNIDO project to install multifunctional platforms, such as setting up school canteens, building wells, or launching community radio stations. Those activities were being carried out by WFP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) respectively. The approach had proved successful, since in villages where multifunctional platforms had been installed, the proportion of girls attending school had increased from 20 per cent to 40 per cent in three months, owing to a reduction in the amount of time women had to spend doing chores. It was also possible to group projects around a common outcome. Thus UNDP, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Population Fund had set up a joint system for planning and follow-up evaluation at regional level. It was also possible to group projects around a common target. For example several agencies were working together in the Tambacounda region to attain Senegal's national target of keeping the proportion of the population suffering from AIDS below 3 per cent.

A number of lessons had so far been learned from the initiative: the country team should take over the exercise; the United Nations system should go beyond the expectations of the authorities and development partners; the coordination funds of the United Nations system and the quality of support provided by the resident coordinator's unit were of great importance; and the United Nations, through UNDAF, could play a key role in the implementation of the PRSP. Tasks for the future were to involve all the main partners in the operation, to give the operation a permanent place within the regional structures, to draw upon the experience acquired to establish a similar initiative in Casamance, and to increase intervention capacity in remote areas of extreme poverty.

Ms. CRONENBERG-MOSSBERG (Sweden) asked how the project, which appeared very interesting, was funded, and in particular whether the various partners pooled their resources. She also wished to know the Senegalese Government's opinion on the functioning of the project.

Mr. ZOLL (Germany), noting that Senegal had been classified among the least developed countries for the past two years, despite the promising start it had made after gaining independence, asked what lessons could be learned from that regression.

Mr. HASSELBALCH (Denmark) requested further details on dialogue between the World Bank and United Nations agencies in the field. He also wondered what role the United Nations system had played in the success of AIDS control in Senegal and what conclusions could be drawn from that experience for the benefit of other countries.

Mr. RHAZAOUI (Resident Coordinator), responding to the question on funding, said that the mandates of the United Nations funds and programmes unfortunately did not allow them to pool their resources. Coordination funds could be used to finance studies and preparatory work but not programmes which, while awaiting United Nations directives, were being implemented by means of parallel funding, and that presented problems of coordination.

Regarding the relationship with the World Bank, he said that UNDP and the Bank worked jointly to ensure the coordination of Senegal's donors. On the ground, the Bank was participating in a number of projects with the United Nations system, but the divergence of their respective procedures meant that it was almost impossible to share costs. He hoped that the World Bank would be involved in the projects implemented as part of the Tamba operation, and he emphasized that the Bank's cooperation was essential if the initiative was to be effective.

Mr. HOPWOOD (UNICEF Representative in Senegal) observed that the success recorded in Senegal in combating AIDS had been primarily due to the Senegalese authorities, who had taken very quick and resolute action to raise public awareness and mobilize society. The United Nations system had supported them, and its various components met regularly to establish how best to contribute to the national strategy for combating the pandemic. That assistance formed part of a much broader cooperation effort which involved a large number of bilateral partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others.

Mr. NIANE (Coordinator, Unit on Follow-up to the Programme to Fight Poverty, Ministry of Economics and Finance of Senegal) said that the Senegalese Government was particularly pleased with the United Nations initiative for the promotion of the Tambacounda region, which rightly focused on synergistic and complementary intervention. Regarding AIDS,

he confirmed that Senegal's success was due to the early establishment, with United Nations support, of a system of prevention and uncensored information, which had not been the case in other African countries. It was now necessary to move further and faster, in order to keep the infection rate among the population low.

Several factors had contributed to Senegal's economic decline to become one of the 20 poorest countries in the world: Aid had not always been used appropriately. Moreover, economic growth until 1994 had not exceeded demographic growth, and its nature had not been conducive either to equitable distribution of income or to job creation. In order to double per capita income by 2015 (and not by 2030, as would be the case if no measures were taken), it would be necessary to promote better-distributed, employment-generating growth propelled forward by the stronger sectors.

Mr. BELLOT (France) emphasized the fundamental role played right from the outset of the fight against AIDS by civil society, in particular the Brotherhood of Mourides, which had set about alerting the population even before the Government. He asked whether UNDP or the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) would coordinate the Tamba initiative. He wished to know what linkages had been established between Senegalese civil society, in particular producers, and the PRSP.

Mr. RHAZAOUI (Resident Coordinator) explained that responsibility for the coordination of activities in Senegal was carried out on a basis of rotation, in order that the heads of the 22 agencies present in the country were involved in the process equally. There was therefore a different coordinator each month. The Programme coordinator in Tambacounda was not UNDP but UNIDO.

Ms. SECK (NGO Consortium for Development Assistance) said that her organization was carrying out multifaceted action in six major fields: health, environment and development, combating poverty, human rights protection, advancement of women, and literacy or education for all. Regarding health, particular emphasis was being placed on combating AIDS, principally through awareness-raising measures. Under the programme for comprehensive health development, approximately 50 NGOs were conducting an extensive campaign to convince the population that Senegal's success in AIDS prevention under no

circumstances meant that efforts could be relaxed. Regarding efforts to combat poverty, Senegalese civil society favoured a participatory approach and particularly wished for the recommendations of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the conclusions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg to be taken into account.

She stressed that access to water, by virtue of its importance for agriculture and health, was imperative for sustainable development. In the majority of developing countries, investment in water supply projects was almost non-existent, which in part explained the rural exodus and with it the transfer of poverty from the countryside to the towns. Regarding biosafety, United Nations agencies must help developing countries to preserve their "food sovereignty", in other words to define their own food safety policies. Civil society was keen to see that every effort was made to ensure that poor countries did not become dumping grounds for new products that could present health risks.

Mr. DORYAN (World Bank) said that in March 2003, the World Bank had approved a new aid strategy for Senegal, one chapter of which specifically concerned the Millennium Development Goals and in particular the obstacles to fulfilling them. The Bank was currently operating 21 projects in Senegal, dealing with nutrition, water, social development, AIDS, agriculture and infrastructure. In accordance with a request from the Senegalese Government, the Bank intended to adopt a new type of assistance, budgetary support, the principle of which was to make funds available to support the implementation of poverty reduction strategies, rather than for a specific project. In that regard, the adoption of a joint strategy by public authorities and civil society would increase the chances of better coordination of the activities on the ground of the different donors. He asked the country team how the process of simplifying and harmonizing the rules and procedures of United Nations agencies would help them to improve their effectiveness on the ground. He asked the Senegalese government representatives what they expected from their partners in the form of development support.

Mr. CISSOKO (CNCR) said that the drafting of the PRSP had led to negotiations between public authorities and civil society on routes to be followed and action to be taken. Since civil society was represented on the committee for the implementation of the PRSP, it would be invited by the Government to the launch, on 17 and 18 July 2003, of the UNDAF initiative for the Tambacounda region.

Ms. FEGAN WYLES (UNDP), answering a question on the funding of the resident coordinator system, explained that the funds came from UNDP, but were managed by the UNDG office on behalf of the United Nations system. Since the country teams had indicated that those funds were insufficient, efforts had been made to diversify funding sources. She considered that the idea of a rotating presidency for the country team was excellent, since all the members would be more deeply involved in the management of the team's activities.

Mr. DIOP (Senegal) expressed his surprise at the fact that none of the speakers had mentioned NEPAD, which the United Nations General Assembly, in its fifty-seventh session, had singled out as the basis for work on combating poverty. He asked whether the different agencies working in Senegal were taking account of NEPAD recommendations, and how they were bringing their projects into line with the poverty reduction strategy and the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. HOPWOOD (UNICEF Representative in Senegal), replying to the observer from the World Bank, said that the process of simplifying and harmonizing the rules and procedures of the United Nations system had already borne encouraging results, particularly in respect of planning, follow-up and evaluation. Every year, the representatives of the various agencies visited the different regions or districts, to hold planning meetings on issues such as improving nutrition and reducing maternal and infant mortality. The establishment of common databases and the adoption by all agencies of identical indicators greatly facilitated project evaluation. There were still some grey areas, but the United Nations system was determined to continue the process of harmonizing and simplifying, in order to increase its effectiveness on the ground.

Mr. NIANE (Coordinator, Unit on Follow-up to the Programme to Fight Poverty, Ministry of Economics and Finance of Senegal) said that such a poor and indebted country as his had to hope that its partners would provide specific aid for the attainment of the main Millennium Development Goal: to reduce poverty by 50 per cent by 2015. He welcomed the open and wide-ranging support for Senegal provided by the international community, and urged donors to provide aid in the form of budgetary support, since that would allow a speedier solution to be found to the country's problems. He confirmed that the PRSP did indeed conform to the strategic recommendations set by NEPAD.

Mr. RHAZAOUI (Resident Coordinator), in his concluding remarks, said that the team's excellent spirit of collaboration had frequently allowed it to achieve beyond its goals. He paid tribute to the remarkable efficiency of his Senegalese colleagues, which had greatly motivated the members of the team. He welcomed the fact that the Senegalese Government, despite its success in respect of the prevention of AIDS, was not reducing its efforts, since it realized that disease was not only a health issue but also a development issue. He emphasized that Senegal was the first developing country to draw up two reports on progress towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

The PRESIDENT thanked the speakers for their contributions to a frank and fruitful dialogue.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.